

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



May 13, 2015

Kabul-Islamabad Cooperation for Peace

Afghan and Pakistani leaders once again reiterated their determination for building close relations and cooperating on the Afghan peace efforts. The Pakistani Prime Minister's visit to Afghanistan is the first since the National Unity Government's takeover in Afghanistan. Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif's visit to Kabul is highlighted by recent efforts of the Afghan government to kick-start a Pakistan-assisted peace talks with the Taliban. At a joint press conference in Kabul on Tuesday May 12, 2015, Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani stressed that the two nations will never again become victims of short-sighted approaches. Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also specifically said that "no enemy of Afghanistan can be a friend of Pakistan," and that peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan is in best interests of both countries. The two leaders asserted that both Kabul and Islamabad will work together to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The visit of Pakistani Prime Minister and the high-profile delegation accompanying him is in fact a part of follow-up diplomatic efforts to conclude the two countries' future course of cooperation on not only mutual relations but most importantly the Afghan peace process. Since the new unity government came into power in Afghanistan, Islamabad have made specific and clear commitments to help Afghanistan in bringing the Taliban to table of negotiations. The shift of policy in Islamabad is seen as result of Afghanistan's new government's policies towards the neighbors and regional countries in order to have their backing for resumption of an Afghan-led peace talks. In recent months, the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have improved rapidly and the two sides have reached remarkable understanding on how to cooperate for peace in Afghanistan.

In fact, the civil government of Pakistan had suggested from the beginning of taking power in the country that it was ready to do more to help Afghanistan for reaching a peace deal with the Taliban. Initially, this helped the two countries to build mutual trusts required for cooperation on the desire of peace in Afghanistan. However, time and again the two sides - President Karzai's administration and the Pakistani government - failed to overcome distrusts and view the issue of peace in Afghanistan through a strategic and long-term approach. In recent years, another crucial change in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan affairs has been almost unprecedented harmony between the country's powerful military establishment and the Pakistani civilian government. While the mood in Islamabad was ready for pushing the peace in Afghanistan, the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG) in Kabul came at a right time to take a cohesive approach with Pakistan towards peace in Afghanistan.

The recent improvements in the two countries' relations set high expectations in Afghanistan both among political class and the public for restart of peace talks and an eventual deal for ending the conflict. Afghan government officials suggested imminent of resumption of peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Many saw the level of cooperation between the two countries over the Afghan peace efforts as unprecedented. As result of the diplomatic efforts by leaders of the Afghan unity government, both military and civilian officials in Pakistani publicly suggested that the Taliban would have no choice but negotiations for peace, and that enemy of Afghanistan would be enemy of Pakistan.

However, despite the early announcements of imminent peace talks with the Taliban, the government of Afghanistan failed to start an immediate process of peace negotiations with the militant groups. With the warmth of the weather, the Taliban launched concerted and deadly attacks as part of their spring offensive in many of the provinces across Afghanistan. The onset of a deadly spring fighting targeting vast swathes of lands in different parts of Afghanistan particularly in the north brought many to the conclusions that the peace negotiations may not resume as the war escalates. Even, many turned skeptical towards Pakistan's promise of helping the peace talks in Afghanistan. The failure to start the pledged process of talks was also interpreted as Pakistan's failure in fulfilling its pledge for helping in the process.

Pakistan had a supportive role in the recent 'peace discussions' between Afghan officials and the Taliban delegation in Qatar. The Taliban has been encouraged in recent months to enter peace negotiations with the government of Afghanistan. While the informal talks were taking place in Qatar, the Pakistani government welcomed the talks and encouraged the Taliban to engage in talks for exploring ways for ending the conflict in Afghanistan. The Pakistani government has had constructive role in facilitating travel of Taliban members and arranging Qatar as the venue for talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

However, there are also widespread skepticisms among Afghan political elites and former government officials towards Pakistan's promised pledge for helping the Afghan government in entering negotiations with the Taliban. As the insurgency is wreaking havoc in large swathes of Afghanistan, many are losing hopes for restart of a Pakistani-assisted process of talks with the Taliban. With the continued violence, many believe that Pakistan is still holding back its full cooperation for starting peace talks with the Taliban. The public losing trust on Afghan and Pakistani cooperation for immediate start of peace negotiations would not be helpful for the whole process. Therefore, Pakistani and Afghan governments do not have many choices for testing each other and delaying the much-awaited talks with the militant groups. The Pakistani leader rightly condemned the ongoing Taliban attacks in Afghanistan and expressed concerns over continued violence in the country. He also asserted that his country will stand against any efforts for destabilizing Afghanistan. Very promising, but perhaps now it is the time for Pakistan to prove it in action.



Who is the Winner?

By Hujjatullah Zia

The revival of the Afghan Taliban as a powerful insurgent force that was apparently routed in 2001 should not come as a surprise. In fact, the radical group was never really defeated. Their fighters melted away into the population or took sanctuary across the border in Pakistan among their Pakhtun brethren. Most of the leadership had survived the offensive and also moved to Pakistan," these words were written by a Pakistani author and journalist.

The US-led counter-terrorism strategy launched in the aftermath of 9/11 failed to stop militancy in Afghanistan. Although, the Taliban militants were decentralized and their regime was dismantled in the beginning, however the triumph was short-lived. Three years later, the US found itself involved in its second Afghan war with thousands of coalition forces engaged in fierce battle with revitalized and regrouped Islamic insurgents. The ragtag militants, who seemed to disappear forever, were aided to come under a single banner so as to fight against Afghan-American soldiers.

In other words, the Taliban guerillas were engaged in second war with new ideology namely "jihad" and prompted the teens to deem it imperative upon themselves to join them. Since the radical ideologues considered the foreign troops as the sworn enemy of their ideology, they remained as a formidable opponent and ready to sacrifice their lives.

However, political interests were the ulterior motive for the real players. I believe that the Taliban are categorized into two main groups: the ideologues and the mercenaries. The mercenaries are those who were marginalized from the society and bereft of the economic boost. They stoop so low to take the life of others so as to save their own. Humanity and ethical codes are utterly meaningless in their lives. To put it succinctly, what matter for them are not moral values but money and properties and they are a vehicle for the real players, who are planning behind the veil. Therefore, they kill people indiscriminately, including women and children.

The same categorization is applicable to Daesh. To satiate their sinister desires, they announced "jihad-e nikah" behind human façade. The fact is that they come out of the poor and cruel families. In another item, besides suffering economic pressures, they failed to receive parental sympathy. Thus, they take a sort of revenge with a deep sense of intolerance. Being brought up in cold atmosphere, the militants never feel sorry to shed the blood of the innocent individuals.

Daesh emerged in Iraq and later spread to Syria with further ambitions to expand across the Middle East. So a curious debate has started with regards to its sudden appearance here in Afghanistan.

Most Afghans who know their history would argue that the idea of a full-fledged radical ideology would never succeed in

our country. Even the Taliban who were to some extent "home-grown" never quite managed to rule the entire country with their radical approach.

The real danger, however, is apparent when looking at the broader picture. Afghanistan has always been at the crossroads of Asia. Our country's strategic geopolitical position makes it a desirable location and sacrificial lamb for any ambitious political power in this region wishing to have a presence here.

Anyhow, despite announcing "spring offensive", with a rocket attack on a US base outside Kabul last month, the Taliban has given the Afghan government a green light to come on the table of negotiation. Significantly, the Qatar meeting took place amidst the spring offensive by the Taliban, testing the mettle of the Afghan National Army backed by a relatively small residual American force. The government forces have shown greater grit and capacity to confront the ferocity of the Taliban attacks but the high rate of troop desertion and casualties remains a serious concern.

Although the Taliban have made significant advances, even in some northern districts there is still no possibility of the insurgents overrunning major cities leave aside Kabul. Despite all its problems and weaknesses, the Afghan National Army can hold its ground. The presence of residual troops has reinforced its confidence.

Meanwhile, "the Taliban have their own problem of maintaining unity in their ranks. Though Mullah Omar remains the supreme leader, it is not clear if he has the same unchallenged authority he enjoyed a decade ago."

With the emergence of many new militant groups, especially Daesh, some believe that the influence of the Taliban's Supreme leader Mullah Omar is waning. As a result, a number of Taliban insurgents have also pledged allegiance to Daesh and have changed their white flag into black one. Currently, a legion of militants is operating under the name of Daesh in Afghanistan. So, Mullah Omar seems to have turned into more of a symbolic figurehead.

No matter whether the militants are operating under the black flag of Daesh or the white flag of Taliban, an effective strategy should be planned to counter terrorism more seriously. The rise in militancy should be responded strongly so that the militants do not cherish the wish for basing in any particular part of the country or show further flexibility in making peace. In short, Afghanistan must not be permitted to descend back into chaos as it did after the Soviet Union's withdrawal in the late 1980s - or the crucible of death that Iraq has become in the wake of the US troops' departure. I hope this time; our soldiers will be the winner and root out the terrorists from the country.

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Foundation Stone of Sustainable Human Bond!

Communication is an important facet of life. Persuasive communication skills are essential in all spheres of life. Be it an interview or dealing with the project leader or working out a solution with a team or writing a report, getting across the point effectively is what matters. The success of an endeavor hinges on the ability to communicate effectively in today's fast paced life, everyone is asked to do more with less. In such a scenario effective communication holds the key.

Man is said to be social animal not because he socializes but he communicates. One may consider the superficial agents entailing the unmet needs of man, serving as a social bond for co-existence. Nevertheless, the supporting element overshadowing the de-facto communication being the tool of tongue and beauty of minds that relentlessly feeds it for making a heartening and ear-catching communication. Handsome is he, who owes a beautiful mind associated with lenient communication skills. The vital source of diplomacy and individual's universal fame and acceptance rests on his capabilities; turning the inexplicable into homogenized and mind-blowing idea subsequent to, scattered facts converged and the sole plan diverged.

People in organizations usually spend 75 percent of their daily time on communication through writing, reading, listening, speaking, inter-debate etc. Effective communication is an essential component for organization success, whether it is the interpersonal intra group organization or external levels. Communication skills are as important as technical qualifications for youngsters aiming at a bright career. Communications hold the key. Poor communication skills, low confidence levels and improper body language have resulted out in the job race. The person recruited will have to deal with the global clients directly. The command over the language and accent neutralization also plays a vital role in the recruitment process. The importance of communication skills in your organization is high and should be made a priority if it is not already. The importance of communication skills exists because without communication no real or effective work could ever be carried out.

Effective communication centers round the usage of words, speed of delivery of words, pitch modulation and body language. Using the right tools to communicate the right messages at the right time can salvage crises and motivate people to work towards success. Truly said, communication works but for those who work at it. In the existing globalization scenario, most of the Information Technology, I.T Enabled Services, management institutes, public and private sector, multi-national Companies, and Public Service Commission are search for a right and suitable fresher for executive posts. Whatever be the recruiting criteria, the candidate have to satisfy the skill sets that the companies were looking for. And unani-

mously, the skills set that they were looking for communication skills. Effective communication skills are very important in all aspects of life, be it work or in relationships. People in organizations typically spend a major part of their time in interacting with people. Thus it is no surprise to find that at the root of a large number of organizational problems is poor communications. This is most obvious in cross-cultural situations where language is an issue. But it is also common among people of the same culture. Also in developing social relationships, communication skills are of utmost importance. Proper communication skills help people in understanding each other and work together towards a goal.

Better relationships between your family, friends, and spouse will result from good communication as well. When you can effectively convey your feelings and listen to the feelings of others then you will be using good communication improvement skills. This allows people to feel closer to you and to feel as if they know what you want and do not want because you are able to communicate that. As a result of communication improvement skills you will have better relationships.

Often a person wants to say something but communicates something totally different through vocal intonation and body language. These mixed signals force the receiver to choose between the verbal and non-verbal parts of the message, which may not help to get ones message across to that individual because most often, the receiver chooses the nonverbal aspects. Mixed messages create tension and distrust because the receiver senses that the communicator is hiding something or is being less than candid. Thus one must understand that communication skills are not only important to develop an impression on the other person and get the required work done, but also to not get a bad idea about themselves in society.

There are a number of situations when you need to solicit good information from others; these situations include interrogating candidates, solving work problems, seeking to help an employee on work performance, and finding out reasons for performance discrepancies at work. In society it helps in judging an individual's ability to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds.

As you can see it is very important in every aspect of your life to have good and effective communication. There is no reason why you should not focus every ounce of your energy on communication improvement skills. Communication skills will be around us forever and will continue to thrive and develop as time goes by. These effects on communication skills showed that one can interpret different things through one's communication skills. As one improves their communication skills it shows us how to talk, listen and communicate better with one another. As the world progresses we will see more people taking more time to develop this skill to their fullest. As an appealing communication plays indispensable role in bridging the distant, desperate and disheartened souls whilst laying the foundation stone of an effective and sustainable human bonds; the eternal demand of human civilization.

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